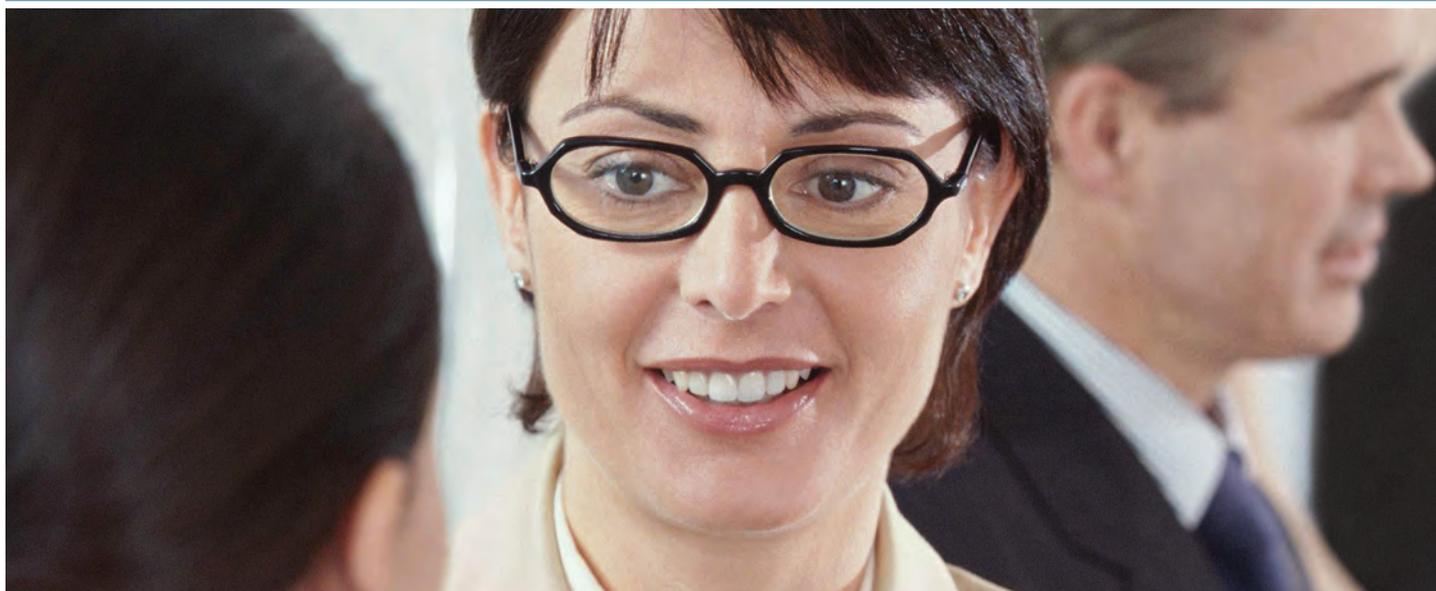


# Unit 1

# Break the ice

| Start a conversation

| Make small talk



## Task 1

### Objective: Start a conversation

Boston-based company nTAG have designed a conference badge with a difference: delegates enter information about their jobs and interests. When they meet another person with similar hobbies, the interactive badges introduce the wearers and tell them what they have in common. The aim is to make networking easier by using the badge to help start conversations.

Whole group  
5 minutes

### Step 1

**What information would you put on your nTAG badge? Make a badge for yourself and include information about:**

- your job
- your interests outside work
- something interesting or surprising about who you are or what you do

Use no more than ten words for each topic.

Whole group  
10 minutes

### Step 2

**Move around the room introducing yourself and shaking hands. Use the information on the badge to start a short conversation with each person. Talk to as many people as possible and move on to a new person after one or two minutes.**

**Analysis**  
5 minutes

Did you find it easy or difficult to start a conversation?

What did you find most difficult?

Did the badges help? How?

What did you talk about with different people?

### What do you think?

Whole group  
5 minutes

## Breaking the ice

Do you think the nTAG badge is a useful idea to help break the ice when starting a conversation?

Imagine you are attending a conference where you don't know anyone. It is the first coffee break and lots of people are standing around talking. How would you start a conversation? What techniques can you think of to join in a conversation with a group of people? Would you use the same techniques to break the ice with an individual?



Good business practice, page 76

### What do you say?

5 minutes

## Starting a conversation

There are several ways to start a conversation. Match the techniques 1-4 with the phrases a-d.

- |                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| 1 Greeting                | a That was an interesting talk about managing change. |
| 2 Asking an open question | b The CEO is a brilliant speaker, isn't he?           |
| 3 Making a statement      | c I don't think we've met - I'm ...                   |
| 4 Using a tag question    | d How are you enjoying the conference?                |



Grammar reference: Review of tenses 1, Present tenses, page 83



Grammar reference: Question forms, page 87

### CD 2 Listening 1

5 minutes

Listen to the start of eight conversations and identify which technique above each speaker uses.

### Practice

Pairs  
5 minutes

Use the techniques in the following situations.

- 1 You are waiting to get your ID badge at the start of a conference. Think of something to say to the person waiting in front of you in the queue.
- 2 The first speaker has just finished their presentation. The speech went on for forty minutes longer than expected. Say something to the person sitting next to you.
- 3 There is a coffee break between talks. You are waiting to get a drink. Start a conversation with the person standing next to you.
- 4 You are in the self-service cafeteria at lunchtime. You think there's a free seat at one of the tables. Ask the person sitting at the table if the seat is free and start a conversation.
- 5 There is a party at the end of the conference. You see one of the speakers standing alone. Introduce yourself and start a conversation.

## Making small talk

People have different areas of their life, which we can call 'life spaces'. Our personal or private life space is the part which we keep to ourselves, or share with our family and very close friends. Our public life space is the part that we are happy to share with the people we meet on a casual or short-term basis. People from specific cultures have a small private space and relatively large public space: those from diffuse cultures have a much larger private space. Which are you? Complete your culture profile on page 82.

People from specific cultures ...	People from diffuse cultures ...
seem friendly and accessible because they give information about themselves freely from the very first meeting.	seem hard to know because they don't tell you much about themselves unless they know you well.
have friendly relationships with a lot of people who are not necessarily close or lifetime friends. These relationships may seem superficial to people from diffuse cultures.	have a few close friends, with whom they have a long-term relationship and share many aspects of their private lives.
are happy to talk about personal matters with anyone they meet.	don't like to talk about personal matters in the context of a business relationship.

### What do you say?

Pairs

10 minutes

## Open and closed questions

Look at these conversational questions. Which are closed (can be answered with a simple Yes or No)? Which ones are open (more likely to lead to a longer response)?

- 1 Are you staying at this hotel?
- 2 What do you think of the hotel?
- 3 It's very informal here, isn't it?
- 4 Are you here on your own?
- 5 What are things like in your country?
- 6 What kind of business are you in?
- 7 Do you travel much in your job?
- 8 What do you like about travelling?

Use the prompts below to ask your partner questions.

*Are you interested in ... ?*

*What do you think of ... ?*

*What are things like in your ... ?*

*What do you like about ... ?*

### CD 3 Listening 2

10 minutes

**1** Listen to six short conversations between people who have just met at a conference. In which conversations do people ask open questions?

**2** Listen again and notice the responses. In which conversations do the people responding sound interested and friendly?



### What do you say?

Pairs  
5 minutes

## Conversational responses

**1** Look at the typical conversational responses 1–6 below. Think of a comment that could lead to each response.

**2** Work with a different partner. Take turns to make your comments and respond with one of the phrases.

- 1 Oh, really?
- 2 That sounds good.
- 3 What a pity.
- 4 That's true, yes.
- 5 It is, isn't it?
- 6 How nice.

### Task 2

Whole group  
15–20 minutes

#### Objective: Make small talk

You are attending a welcome party on the first evening of a conference. Start a conversation with at least three other people. After a few minutes, stop the conversation and move on to someone new. Remember to:

- use open questions
- respond with interest
- use a polite phrase to move on, for example:

*You'll have to excuse me a moment ...*

*It was good to meet you ...*

*I have to go now, but it was good talking to you ...*

### Analysis

5 minutes

Were you able to think of suitable ways of starting a conversation?

Were you able to respond to questions?

How did your partner show interest?

Did you find it easy or difficult to move on to the next person?

### Self-assessment

Think about your performance on the tasks. Were you able to:

- |                         |                              |   |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| – start a conversation? | <input type="checkbox"/> yes | <input type="checkbox"/> need more practice |
| – make small talk?      | <input type="checkbox"/> yes | <input type="checkbox"/> need more practice |